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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 000159

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV EAID SNAR CA HO

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH VISITING CANADIAN  
MINISTER OF STATE KENT

REF: A. TEGUCIGALPA 154  
1B. TEGUCIGALPA 153

Classified By: Ambassador Hugo Llorens, reason 1.4 (B and D)

11. (C) Summary: The Ambassador met with visiting Canadian Minister of State for the Americas Peter Kent on February 18.

The Ambassador briefed Kent on the current political, diplomatic and economic environment in Honduras following the January 27 inauguration of President Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo. Kent expressed Canadian support for the principled approach the United States took regarding the coup d'etat of June 28, 2009, and subsequent efforts to resolve the political crisis.

The Ambassador expressed gratitude for Canada's support and leadership in the diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis, and noted that President Lobo had already made great strides toward healing the social and political rifts in the country, and normalizing Honduras' relations with the international community and the international financial institutions, but that more work needed to be done. The Ambassador highlighted the continued need for President Lobo to show the world that the civilian Honduran authorities were in charge of the armed forces (HOAF) by naming a new Minister of Defense (MOD) and Chief of the Armed Forces (CHOD). End summary.

12. (C) The Ambassador briefed Kent on the events that led up to the June 28, 2009 coup, the efforts made to resolve the political crisis and the situation since the inauguration of President Lobo. Kent was accompanied by Canadian Ambassador to Honduras Neil Reeder, who is resident in Costa Rica. The Ambassador noted that the United States had taken a principled approach to the crisis, always supporting the restoration of the democratic and constitutional order. He noted that this approach included suspension of U.S. assistance to and contact with the de facto regime and the HOAF, and had applied direct pressure on individuals in the regime and those who carried out the coup, including revocation of U.S. visas. The Ambassador noted however, that the United States also acknowledged the complexity of the crisis, and the fact that President Jose Manuel "Mel" Zelaya shared responsibility for creating the political environment that led up to the coup. The Ambassador said the Secretary had maintained that a negotiated solution was the best way forward, which is why she supported the Arias-led mediation that culminated in the Tegucigalpa-San Jose Accord. The Ambassador acknowledged the important role Canada played in the process of finding a solution, both in the discussions

among the Organization of American States (OAS) foreign ministers and in encouraging the Honduran negotiating teams to come to the table and eventually sign the accord. The Ambassador added that the United States valued Canada's continued leadership, and said Kent's visit was important to building political stability and forward progress in Honduras.

¶13. (C) The Ambassador said that the United States had supported the Honduran people's right to select their political leaders through elections, and noted that the November 2009 elections had enjoyed solid participation by the population, and had been sufficiently free, fair, and transparent in their execution to allow the United States to acknowledge their outcome. However, the Ambassador noted that human rights had remained a front-burner issue throughout the crisis, and the United States had made frequent statements regarding human rights concerns. He said President Lobo and his National Party had won a strong mandate at all levels, but expectations were extremely high across the social and political spectrum for the new administration and National Party-controlled Congress to repair the damage done to the country by the crisis.

¶14. (C) The Ambassador said that while the United States was in the process of restoring law enforcement cooperation and assistance, and was working with the U.S. Congress to take the necessary legal steps to resume other civilian assistance, the United States would not move forward with military assistance or contact until President Lobo demonstrated that he had control over the HOAF by appointing a MOD and CHOD not connected to the coup or the de facto regime. The Ambassador said that thus far, the United States

had been impressed by President Lobo's political and diplomatic skills, and said President Lobo was making excellent progress and doing the right things to mend international relations. The Ambassador said that politically, President Lobo had succeeded in forming a unity government that included leaders from all five political parties.

¶15. (C) The Ambassador noted that on the economic front, Honduras had suffered a double blow, first from the global economic crisis, and the second from the severe economic impact of the political crisis, and so President Lobo needed to rebuild relations with the international community in order to reestablish economic assistance and opportunities. The Ambassador said the deterioration of public finances during the crisis along with a surge in debt made the potential for financial dislocation high. The Ambassador noted that efforts to rebuild social and political stability would be undermined by the economic problems. He said that President Lobo was doing a good job rebuilding regional re-engagement, and the Central American Bank for Integration (CABEI) had just normalized relations with the Government of Honduras (GOH) (Ref A).

¶16. (C) Kent said that Canada agreed with the U.S. policy and its principled approach to resolving the crisis. He said he had productive meetings during his visit, in particular with President Lobo. He said he believed President Lobo was genuinely committed to mending Honduras' social and political rifts, and praised his rapid forward progress, in particular in forming a national unity government and his progress toward establishing a truth commission. Kent said he had highlighted to President Lobo the importance of human rights in Honduras. He said President Lobo had assured him that his administration would be taking a tough stand on law and order, but with careful attention to respecting human rights in the process. Kent said he had also stressed the importance of combating corruption. He said President Lobo stated his commitment to ensuring a more transparent government that would be responsive to the people's needs. He stated that President Lobo had told him that he would ensure a full investigation into the recent Nacaome Dam scandal (Note: details of this scandal will be reported septel. End note) implicating members of the de facto regime, and that if the evidence supported it, he would not

hesitate to prosecute Micheletti and other members of his regime.

¶ 7. (C) Kent said he had other productive meetings, in particular with former Guatemalan Vice President Eduardo Stein, who has been selected by President Lobo to be the international coordinator of the truth commission (Ref B). Kent said he was extremely impressed by Stein, who along with Honduran commission head Jorge Casco is doing work preparing the terms of reference for the commission. Kent said that President Lobo has moved back the date to inaugurate the commission from February 25 to mid-March, noting this would allow time for former Chilean President Ricardo Lagos and Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis, the international Verification Commission members to be present. Kent said President Lobo had mentioned (U.S.-born) former Peruvian Foreign Minister and current magistrate on the Inter-American Court of Human Rights Diego Garcia Sayan as the likely second international member of the truth commission.

¶ 8. (C) Regarding reintegration, Kent was doubtful Honduras would be allowed back into the OAS any time soon, although he said Canada would support an early vote. He said he did not believe the votes were there to achieve the necessary two-thirds margin. More likely, he said, the Honduran issue would be dealt with by the General Assembly in June. Kent stressed that we needed to assiduously work Brazil and the Caribbean nations. He remarked he was disappointed with Mexico and its unwillingness to provide leadership on Honduras.

¶ 9. (C) Kent said Canada had a small development assistance program in Honduras, and was in the process of reviving it in a step by step approach. He said their primary focus would be on an administration of justice program, and they had signed an accord with Attorney General Rubi to provide assistance to Honduran prosecutors. Kent said it was important to strengthen Honduran law enforcement capabilities in order to counter the international crime threat.

¶ 10. (C) Comment: Canada has been an effective partner in seeking a negotiated solution to the political crisis, using their perceived neutrality in the eyes of the de facto regime to push the Micheletti team to the negotiating table at critical points. It was clear from the meeting with Kent that Canada will continue to play an important role in Honduras' social and political healing process. End comment.  
LLORENS